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From the Heart – The most needful things

"Your children are young trees entrusted to you; your house is the nursery where they ought to grow, and you are the gardeners. But oh! will you plant those tender and precious saplings in a sterile and sandy soil? Yet this is what you are doing if there is nothing in your house to make them grow in the knowledge and love of their God and Saviour. Are you not preparing for them a favourable soil from which they can derive sap and life? What will become of your children in the midst of all the temptations that will surround them and draw them into sin? What will become of them in these troublous times, in which it is so necessary to strengthen the soul of the young man by the fear of God. . ."ⁱⁱⁱ The metaphor of tender plants falls short of the glory of children, created in the image of God, and the world is certainly no longer a garden. Our world is in a mess because many of the foundations (including the family) are being destroyed. Godly parents have a very sobering responsibility, but very great and precious promises of God's blessing in the task.

Children need to be taught the truth about the world. They need to know the relative value of all things. They need to understand cause and effect. Externally, they need to learn the physical and natural laws of our world (e.g. the weather, gravity, the seasons). Internally, they need to understand why people behave as they do; why life doesn't seem fair. They need to realize the fickleness of their feelings. They need to understand their uniqueness as the special creation of God and their accountability to Him. Teach your children about God and all His ways in every aspect of life.

We are commanded to love the LORD with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength. Teaching the things you love and enjoy should be easy. It should flow from you just as naturally as teaching your children to speak English. Teaching will be natural when your teaching and your conduct fit together and are in harmony. The scripture judges those "desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm"ⁱⁱⁱ as though teaching and conduct of life could be contradictory. Children very quickly see through such hypocrisy. Of those who cause little ones to go astray, Jesus said, "it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."ⁱⁱⁱ Is the Lord's evaluation of your curriculum, "you have taught 'for doctrines [teachings] the traditions of men?"^{ivii} The secret to easy teaching is that you must understand (and value) the subject yourself. You must set an example first. You must be patient, and sensitive to the needs and questions of your little ones. You must value them. Do you have the heart of a disciple (a learner)? Do you have an insatiable desire to learn and to understand? Apply the do-unto-others principle to the way you teach and the materials you use for teaching. Is this how I would like to learn?

Academic education is not the most important thing. Some very well-educated folks were strongly rebuked by Jesus: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge. . ."iv It is possible to fill your children's heads with knowledge and yet withhold from them the key of knowledge (described in Colossians 2:3). Paul said, "Though I have . . . all knowledge; . . . and have not charity, I am nothing."^{vi} Academics are only a tool for learning the more important things in life. I am certainly not opposed to academics or knowledge—I am simply suggesting that they be kept in their proper perspective. Learning of the wonders of God and His creation gives joy to the soul. Learning about life includes the development of observing skills and thinking skills, listening skills and speaking skills, reading skills and writing skills.

Thinking skills are usually neglected in school, with memorization offered as a substitute. Thinking skills are usually quite well-developed before children reach "school age." Children are born with an incredible natural curiosity about life. I recently heard an interesting definition of life: "a correspondence with the world around" (the ability to sense and respond). Eyes to see, ears to hear, and the other senses are gates that fill the mind of a child with information about the world. Children have spent their entire life trying to figure out the world—classifying, organizing, interpreting, questioning, etc. Children are usually very bright. Beginning-school-age children typically have a recognition vocabulary of about 75,000 words. They have been taught by the things you have told them and showed them, and by the questions you've answered. I am convinced that much of traditional curriculum for early grades is an insult to the intelligence to children. To use the printed page as the only means of teaching children with minimal or non-existent reading skills means that you must start at square one. (In "school" this works quite well, for "the point of the school institution is to make everyone think alike."^{vii}) The effective avenues for learning should not be abandoned just because a child learns to read. Thinking should continue to be encouraged and parents should teach their children how to take every thought captive, how to set their affection on things above, *et cetera*.

Reading is a key that unlocks the world to your child. A child who cannot read is dependent on what he is told by others. Is education effective if a student is taught to read, but in the process learns to hate or despise reading? The child who possesses this key must be supervised until he learns to use it wisely. After learning the *mechanics* of reading, the child needs to master the *comprehension* of reading, followed by *discernment* in reading. Children must be trained not only to recognize the difference between right and wrong, truth and lies, but to learn to love good and hate evil. I was very pleased with my seven-year-old when he asked me after hearing a story, "Dad, was he lying or being deceitful?" His question showed that he sought to distinguish the untruths of misleading words and outright lying.

Writing skills allow ideas to be recorded and passed on to others. (What is the point of creative writing if one has nothing to say?) The copying of worthwhile passages help the student commit precious words to remembrance. My thirteen-year-old daughter has undertaken the ambitious task of writing all of the psalms. You'd be amazed how much grammar, spelling, and punctuation can be learned from a good example.

Drawing demonstrates the difference between what the eye sees and how the brain routinely interprets it. A person unskilled at drawing tends to draw things as they think they are. For example, a child will typically draw a round object as a circle regardless of the perspective from which it is viewed. Drawing develops fine-motor skills and hand-eye coordination in preparation for handwriting. Drawing trains your child to pay attention to details of the world around them. Students can sketch historical events, geographic features, scientific concepts, or creative inventions. A picture can truly be worth a thousand words.

Science is the study of the handiwork of God. The incredible diversity of the world shows the creativity of God. Parents need to teach the young to "look through nature to nature's God, and . . . [show] them that the God who speaks so lovingly to us in the Bible is the same God whose wisdom, power and goodness are so wonderfully displayed in the sun, moon, stars, clouds, mountains, seas, rivers, trees, flowers and other glorious works around us."^{viii} Students must also learn to recognize the myth of evolution wherever it is invoked.

If you do not have "a developed Christian Worldview, all . . . [your] 'default drive' assumptions will come from . . . surrounding culture, and not from the bible."^{ix} Because we were steeped in the traditions of classroom schooling, we will gravitate toward the same. We will only be set free from our own experience by a higher law. As the laws of aerodynamics enable a bird to fly in spite of the law of gravity, in the same way, "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."^x Substituting a cleaned-up, sanitized, or baptized version of public education for godly training is both inadequate and ineffective for bringing up children in the way they should go.

Young children must be brought up to know the goodness of God, which should be revealed in every "subject" of the curriculum. Those who know not His goodness will be unable to "wait upon the Lord." Yet, it had never been taught to me, and how can you teach what you don't know. (But remember, God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.) I must have recalled Psalm 136:1 as we read a book about heroes^{xi} and another about animal heroes^{xii} and *Readers Digest* articles about heroic rescues. Perhaps adrenalin is an inadequate explanation. (If adrenalin works miracles—why would athletes bother with steroids?) Maybe God actually works in the world in which we live. (Hint: see Job 36:26-37:24) Perhaps winds and rain, floods, fires, tornadoes, and hurricanes, blizzards, heat waves, and cold snaps are all agents

that do his bidding. Maybe that's why God is called the LORD of hosts. What an incredible thought. And of course, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."^{xiii} Is it possible that the Word of God includes what God says as he commands all the forces of "nature," the leaders of the governments of the world, even the laws of physics and the laws of probability and statistics. Slowly I began to realize what a mighty God we serve. And to think that He loves me!

Misc.—What's Wrong?

Who are our enemies? The 'humor' about political correctness is a sad commentary that many in government and media have lost touch with the people as they have sought their own (Satan's?) agenda. If the values they esteem are despised, ridiculed, or mocked by the common people, are they leaders or foreigners to traditional values of the people? The problem is deeper than values and moral standards of the *people* in high places. Some laws themselves have been made in areas which are out of the bounds of civil authority. Psalm 11:3 asks, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Christians must have discernment to know and uphold the foundations that God has established and to stand firm in the power of God's Word against usurpations. We must know how to "fight the good fight of faith."^{xiv} The weapons of our warfare are not carnal (i.e. of the flesh). "Reformation works by the power of the Word, of doctrine, cultivation, and truth, while revolution, or rather revolt, operates by the power of riot, of the sword, and of the club."^{xv}

"In the 20th century, pastors and Christian School administrators are amazed at the hostility and venom of state and federal officials. After all, it is the Christian Schools that produce the best students and the finest citizens. In a time of growing delinquency, crime in the state schools, and social disintegration, why do men not welcome the stability which Christian schools give to society? The answer is that, at their worst, the state school delinquents and the criminals in society are preferred to Christians by these humanists, because these lawless elements do not constitute an intellectual, theological and moral challenge to their statist plan of salvation. The Christians clearly do. Humanism today has a militant plan of salvation by statist action. To institute that plan means silencing Christians and obliterating Christian institutions."^{xvi} Understanding of this lies in knowing who the enemy really is. Scripture teaches that we "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Those who are the enemies of Christ manipulate earthly powers for their own purposes (just as a child tries to manipulate mom and dad against a sibling). And they are *motivated* by concern for their "right" to sin (have their way) without the interference of Christians, because they hate the light.

Home educators are leaders. Although some are just non-conformists, many are men and women of principle. They have chosen not to follow the crowd,

recognizing the crowd is on a slippery slope inclined to destruction. They are not victims of the herd mentality. What about you? Are you a leader in fear? Are you an example to others? Do you home educate because it is the least bad of the available options? Do you simply wring your hands or quiver in fear? Do you live in fear of a knock at the door?

Or, are you one who knows what you're doing and why you're doing it? Are you a leader in faith, daily setting the example of trust, yea confidence, in the Living God; who is bigger than all the mess the whole world is in; who has never been caught off guard by the designs and inventions of the wicked; who has delivered people from countless calamities. Though there may be dark conspiracies, my hope is in God as Psalm 21:11 says, "For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are *not able to perform*." Needed today are men and women and children who know the goodness of God and the power of God, and who know how to go to the throne of grace in Prayer.

One disciple [μαθητης] to another,

Greg Stablein

ἰ *Family Worship: Motives and Directions for Domestic Piety*, by J.H. Merle d'Aubigne, 1827

ἱἱ Timothy 1:7

ἱἱἱ Luke 17:2

ἱἱἱ Mark 7:7

V Luke 11:52

VIἱ Corinthians 13:2

VIIἱ "Absolute Absolution," audio tape by John Gatto, August 1994

VIIIἱ *Nature's Mighty Wonders*, by Richard Newton, 1871

IXἱ "Repairing the Ruins: Schools and 'Secondary' Doctrine," by Douglas Wilson, *Credenda Agenda*, Vol. 7(1995), No. 2

X John 8:32

XIἱ *Rescue! True Stories of Heroism*, by L. B. Taylor, 1978

XIIἱ *Real Animal Heroes*, Edited by Paul Drew Stevens, 1990

XIIIἱ Romans 10:17

XIVἱ Timothy 6:12 (note that the word *fight* is *αγῶν* which means a public conflict)

XVἱ *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, by J.H. Merle d'Aubigne, 1846

XVIἱ *Christianity and the State*, by Rousas J. Rushdoony, 1986